

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 05295 01 OF 02 201715Z

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2716

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMKONSUL JERUSALEM 1247

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 5295

E. O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT MPOL IS

SUBJ: PRESS FOCUS ON CHANGING OF THE GUARD AT CENTRAL COMMAND

1. SUMMARY. MORDECHAI GUR'S RETIREMENT AS CHIEF OF STAFF HAS BEEN ACCCOMPANIED BY FAVORABLE PRESS COMMENTARY ON GUR'S TENURE AND WHAT IS REGARDED AS HIM MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENT: THE REHABILITATION OF THE IDF FROM ITS POST-YOM KIPPUR DOLDRUMS. GENERAL GUR, IN THE VIEW OF THE PRESS, CAN TAKE PRIDE IN THE FACT HE IS TURNING OVER TO HIS SUCCESSOR THE BEST IDF EVER. IN OTHER COMMENTARY IT IS NOTED THAT GENERAL GUR, WHO DID NOT REFRAIN FROM COMMENTING ON POLITICAL MATTERS, HAD NEVERTHELESS ESTABLISHED CORRECT AND EFFECTIVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AND THE VARIOUS MINI-

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 05295 01 OF 02 201715Z

STRIES. HIS SUCCESSOR, GENERAL EITAN, IS NOTED AS A MAN OF SHARPLY DIFFERENT STYLE AND PUBLIC IMAGE, WHICH WILL SOON MAKE ITS MARK ON THE IDF. GENERAL GUR'S OUTSPKENNESS IS ILLUSTRATED BY AN INTERESTING DESCRIPTION OF HIS RELATIONS WITH DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN WHICH HE PROVIDED TO A YEDIOT INTERVIEWER. END SUMMARY

2. MORDECHAI GUR'S RETIREMENT AS IDF CHIEF OF STAFF HAS PROMPTED A FAIR AMOUNT OF PRESS COMMENT IN THE FORM OF LAUDATORY EDITORIALS AND END-OF-TERM REVIEWS. WITHOUT EXCEPTION, GUR IS SEEN AS HAVING SUCCESSFULLY FILLED THE ROLE OF CHIEF OF STAFF, A ROLE WHICH IS INCOMPARABLY MORE VISIBLE AND POLITICALLY TAXING HERE THAN IN THE U.S. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE COMMENTARY, WHILE UNIVERSALLY FAVORABLE, IS NOT OF THE RAPTORUS KIND THAT ACCOMPANIED THE FAREWELLS TO PREVIOUS CHIEFS, SUCH AS RABIN AND BAR-LEV. IN PART, THIS IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT GUR DID NOT PRESIDE OVER A VICTORIOUS WAR EFFORT, BUT IT ALSO PROBABLY REFLECTS DOUBTS ABOUT THE SOUTH LEBANON OPERATION AND LINGERING DISCOMFORT OVER GUR'S OUTSPOKENNESS INCLUDING HIS REMARKS ABOUT EGYPTIAN DUPLICITY MADE ON THE EVE OF SADAT'S VISIT.

3. MOST OF THE SUMMING-UP COMMENTARY HAS CONCENTRATED ON WHAT IS VIEWED AS GUR'S MAIN CONTRIBUTION: ASSUMING COMMAND DURING ONE OF THE IDF'S DARKEST HOURS ("AN ARMY THAT WAS DEPRESSED, WOUNDED AND EMBITTERED" -- YEDIOT), CHIEF OF STAFF GUR SUCCEEDED IN REHABILITATING IT FULLY. HE IS HANDING THE ISRAELI ARMY OVER TO HIS SUCCESSOR "A BIGGER, STRONGER, AND BETTER EQUIPPED IDF THAN EVER." (MAARIV.)

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 05295 01 OF 02 201715Z

4. OTHER PRESS COMMENT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING POINTS. GUR ALWAYS INSISTED ON THE NEED FOR FORMULATING AND EXPLAINING MILITARY POLICY WITHIN A BROADER POLITICAL CONTEXT. HIS POLITICAL VIEWS, SAYS DAVAR, "CONTRIBUTED TO THE FORMULATION OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT'S POSITION DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN INTERIM AGREEMENT." ALSO, ACCORDING TO DAVAR, GUR WAS ONE OF THE FEW IN THE ISRAELI LEADERSHIP WHO TRIED "TO MAKE POLITICAL USE" OF THE LITANI OPERATION.

5. THE PRESS SPECULATES THAT GUR'S SUCCESSOR, GENERAL EITAN ("RAFUL"), WILL BE FAR MORE CIRCUMSPECT IN HIS POLITICAL UTTERANCES, AND THAT HIS SHARPLY CONTRASTING STYLE -- THAT OF A SOLDIER'S SOLDIER RATHER THAN A POLITICALLY MINDED MILITARY STRATEGIST -- WILL SOON HAVE ITS IMPACT ON THE IDF. "RAFUL" IS BEING FONDLY WELCOMED BY THE PRESS TO HIS NEW POST. YEDIOT, IN

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 05295 02 OF 02 201723Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 5295

REFERRING TO HIS REPUTATION FOR TOUGHNESS, EXPRESSES
THE HOPE THAT "THE VERY NAME OF THE MAN WHO IS THE ISRAELI
COMMANDER IN CHIEF WILL CONTRIBUTE TO PACIFYING THE REGION."

6. AS AN INTERESTING ILLUSTRATION OF GUR'S OUT-
SPOENNESS -- WHICH MANY ASSUME HE WILL SOONER OR
LATER BE CHANNELED INTO A POLITICAL CAREER -- IS HIS
DESCRIPTION TO A YEDIOT INTERVIEWER OF HIS RELATION-
SHIP WITH DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN. HIS REMARKS RUNN
AS FOLLOWS:

QUOTE I HAVE WORKED WITH EZER WEIZMAN FOR ABOUT TEN
MONTHS AND IN THIS RELATIVELY SHORT PERIOD THERE
HAVE BEEN MANY UPS AND DOWNS IN OUR RELATIONS, MOST
OF WHICH, IN MY VIEW, CAME FROM THE PART OF THE
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 05295 02 OF 02 201723Z

DEFENSE MINISTER: I WAS ALREADY AN EXPERIENCED
CHIEF OF STAFF AND HE WAS NEW IN THE JOB OF DEFENSE

MINISTER. AT FIRST, THE DEFENSE MINISTER HAD A LOT OF IDEAS, MOST OF WHICH HE HAD WORKED OUT BEFORE TAKING OVER AT THE MINISTRY. I TOLD HIM FRANKLY IN ONE OF OUR FIRST CONVERSATIONS: "I GIVE YOU TWO MONTHS TO REACH A STATE OF COMPLETE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE IDF AS IT IS TODAY.' AND INDEED AFTER A CERTAIN PERIOD WE GOT INTO A ROUTINE OF STEADY AND POSITIVE WORK, AND IT WAS THEN THAT SADAT'S VISIT CAME. AFTER THE INTERVIEW I GAVE TO YEDIOT AHARONOT, RELATIONS BETWEEN US DETERIORATED TO THE POINT THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTER WAS PREPARED TO TRANSFER ME TO ANOTHER POSITION. HOWEVER, IN LIGHT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EVENTS THAT FOLLOWED THAT VISIT, RELATIONS BETWEEN US IMPROVED ONCE MORE AND FOR THE PAST FEW MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN COORDINATION AND HARMONY IN OUR WORK, WHICH WAS PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN THE LITANI OPERATION. END QUOTE. LEWIS

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